

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 935

SO 012 450

AUTHOR Theman, Jan
 TITLE The Significance of Conceptions of Political Power.
 SPONS AGENCY Tri-Centennial Fund, Stockholm (Sweden).
 PUB DATE Apr 80
 NOTE 46p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Science Research; Citizenship Responsibility; Cognitive Style; *Concept Formation; *Conflict Resolution; Cross Cultural Studies; Democratic Values; Interviews; *Political Power; *Public Opinion; Questionnaires
 IDENTIFIERS Sweden

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study to determine how people view political power within the Swedish system. The objective was to investigate variations in the way people perceive a common social phenomenon. The sample was composed of 15 subjects chosen randomly from the adult population of Goteborg, Sweden. Subjects were interviewed regarding their perceptions of a public demonstration in the streets of Goteborg, explanations of why the conflict was managed the way it was, definitions of the role of power in political task performance, and general observations on the phenomenon of political power. Questionnaires were statistically analyzed. Findings indicated that subjects' perceptions of how the conflict was managed were influenced by their general conceptions of political power. Subjects classified power in three main ways--a position in society, a momentary pattern of dominance, and an inherent quality of political leaders. Responses indicated a strong relationship between conceptions of power and special consideration of circumstances surrounding the political event. The conclusion is that studies such as this one can serve as an example of how individuals integrate knowledge of abstract concepts of everyday phenomena with cognitive structures whereby those phenomena exist in the subjects' minds. (Author/DB)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED184935

Preliminary version

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jan Theman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Significance of Conceptions of Political Power

Jan Theman

Department of Education

University of Goteborg

Sweden

To be presented at the AERA Annual Meeting in Boston,
April 7-11, 1980

The study reported here is financially supported by the
Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation.

SØ 012 450

Jan Theman

Institute of Education, University of Göteborg

The significance of conceptions of political power

In this paper is reported a substudy of a larger project on how adults conceive of certain important phenomena in the world around them, run at the University of Göteborg by a group of researchers of which the author is a member, under the guidance of Professor Marton. The basic assumption behind the project have been that learning and thinking should be described in terms of its content, and that descriptions of how people conceive of certain phenomena in society could help us towards a better understanding of how these phenomena are being conceptualized and acted upon in general. This study focused conceptions of political power in relation to an extensively discussed decision within local politics of Göteborg.

Political power, or rather just "power" has been a fast growing area of research during the last decade. Fogelson and Adams (1977) wrote in the preface to a congress volume on the anthropology of power:

The term 'power' has now become a popular adornment to titles of books in areas ranging from psychology to politics. It is possibly the major contender to replace that declining veteran, 'development' as the Westerner's favorite intellectual catch-all. In the United States, interest in the concept of power has been accompanied by a renaissance in the serious study of Marx and a period of national politics marked by the abuse of governmental controls in everything, from the invasion of privacy to nuclear power facilities. Popularity of the term 'power' clearly reflects a profound concern of the times, yet the meaning of the term is imprecise and unclear.
(Fogelson & Adams, 1977, p xi)

This quotation contains many of our own reasons for undertaking a further study of "power". Numerous other writers have concluded that "power" is a disappointing concept because of it's ambiguity and imprecision (March, 1966; May, 1972) and because it has been analysed from so many different points of view (Friberg, 1973). The many, more or less classical, works on power reflect a wide interest in the topic:

from the philosophical contributions of Russell (1962) and Tillich (1960), to sociological work of Mills (1956), Weber (1947) and Dahl (1957), from anthropological work of Lane (1962), Fogelson & Adams (1977) to authors within the field of political science like Moore (1974), March (1966) and Ferrero (1942), as well as the work of the clinical psychologist May (1972).

This list would presumably be endless if all the work on power from all fields of science were included, but we just wanted to point at the fact that the ambiguity of power has obviously been reflected in the variety of its exponents.

Naturally this has also led to lots of definitions and derivations of the concept, each of them utilizing some combination of the wide range of identified attributes of power. It is not our concern in this paper to increase this heavy stream even further, but rather to concentrate on the phenomenon "power" as it is perceived and reacted upon by normal adult members of our society. We will try to avoid the conceptual level of definition, in favour of a descriptive level of understanding.

The common-sense meaning of political power as revealed in this report could be seen as being in line with the work of Lane (1962), where he described the perspective and consequences of certain political ideologies, but also as a contribution to the mass of knowledge of how we understand and structure complex everyday phenomena. This latter aspect of our study has been outlined by Marton (1978), where he argues for a stronger emphasis on the contextual and relational character of our conception of reality. Marton (1978) points at the existence of what he calls a second-order perspective of statements about perceived reality which is considered to have a complementary relationship to the first-order perspective of statements about reality. Descriptions within the latter perspective would be in physical, metrical terms, descriptions within the former in verbal and descriptive terms.

This distinction made by Marton has had two major effects on this study and report on cognitive phenomena. The variation of a phenomenon can only be described in terms of the words the individual uses to express himself and thus the categorization can never be extended beyond this limit. It has to be found within the utterances made by the subjects if the second-order perspective is to be maintained. Another thing is

the contextual dependency of the meaning of each utterance. The second-order perspective has no definite limits or absolute values; rather, each unit takes on its meaning with reference to the context in which it appeared. The scope of this context is not naturally given, nor is it even obvious in the text. To delimit this one has to use a technique rather similar to the one used in normal conversation. In our case this has meant that the context has varied from the individual's total perspective to a specific meaning of a single word. Lane (1962) also mentioned this circumstance in his study of political ideologies in Eastport.

Implicit in much that is said about the nature and distribution of power in society is a code that assigns legitimacy to some power, benevolence to some, effectiveness to some. Never articulated in this way, the code must be extracted from what is said, as the assumptions and premises of the common man of Eastport. That it may include contradictions is not surprising; the premises of much of our thought, of the thinking of one mind, is contradictory; but very often what seems contradictory is not more so than the 'contradiction' between gravity and the levitation of a balloon-opposing tendencies seeking a balance.
(Lane, 1962, p 44)

Contrary to Lane, however, we think that the categories do not have to be interpreted in such a way; rather, they must be derived from the content given. However, the meaning of the utterances constituting the categories could sometimes only be understood through a rather wide and contextually anchored interpretation.

The contradictions mentioned by Lane (op cit) were also apparent in our study, but in our material they stood out as something fundamentally different from being "opposing tendencies seeking a balance". Rather, we would like to describe this phenomenon as a kind of intra-individual paradox which arose from the conflict between two different, but simultaneously acknowledged, conceptions of power. Such paradoxes often served as the turning point for the internal logical structure of each individual's reasoning. This in turn, we would like to argue, gives evidence of the thesis brought forward by Marton (1968), that there exists a dual character of descriptions, either as abstract instruments or as more or less "frozen" forms of thought, directly applicable in the process of understanding concrete objects.

Our categories of power, as presented below, should be seen as an attempt to show how ordinary Swedes conceive of such a complex idea as political power. Due to the limited extent of this paper we cannot trace those descriptions of the concept of power back to the individuals' descriptions of how the real change of the decision was brought about, i.e. how the expressed conceptions of power were rooted in the individual description of the actual happening. This has so far only been presented in a lengthier report in Swedish (Theman, 1980).

Method

Our aim was to identify and describe the variation in which political power could be conceived of by normal members of society. The first problem raised was to find a good instance of political power to use as a starting point and reference. This, in turn, was impelled by the fact that we did not want, in advance, to define political power in any way, thereby incapsulating our own preunderstanding of the phenomenon we had chosen as the object of study. Hence, we could not identify any concrete object claiming that it was in any sense associated with power, without revealing a kind of predefinition of the concept. But reality came to our help. As we were planning the empirical study, a wild demonstration took place in the streets of Göteborg. The demonstration took the form of people occupying a building site, thereby preventing the planned erection of a garage in the center of Göteborg. The demonstrators feared that the building of the garage would lead to an increase of traffic and pollution in the town, while the responsible politicians who supported the scheme thought that this was an exaggeration and that the garage was necessary for a sound development of trade and commerce in the city. The occupation lasted for eleven days and ended with a new decision, not to build the garage. To the story should be added some further circumstances. Whether or not to build the garage had been a delicate and intensively discussed issue in political circles for three years. The right-wing politicians supported the building of a garage and the left-wing politicians opposed it. Neither of the blocs could get a majority for its proposal, because the left-wing bloc was in the minority and one of the right wing parties had promised not to contribute to further pollution in the city. In the general election in October, shortly before the demonstration took place, the left-wing bloc got a majority in the city council, but as is the custom, the actual change of positions was not effected till the turn of the year, two

months later. The right-wing majority ordered the building to be started after the general election, when the right-wing bloc lost their majority, but before the turn of the year when they had to leave their posts. One of the reasons why the politicians and the police could not get rid of the occupants was the great support the occupation received from the residents of Göteborg.

This happening served as our point of reference for an elaboration of the phenomenon power. We simply asked some citizens in Göteborg to tell us the whole story, to give their opinion of it, and describe how it was possible for a democratic decision, which had been prepared for more than ten years, to be so drastically altered in a period of eleven days. In most cases our subjects spontaneously mentioned the word power, and then we asked them to clarify what they meant by their use of the word, and if they could point at some concrete manifestations of political power, in this case based on their own description of the situation.

This approach led us to a wide elaboration of the individuals' conceptions of the phenomenon "political power" at two different levels. Firstly, as situational descriptions of the actual reality and secondly as verbal descriptions of their own conception of the word "power".

Thirty subjects, randomly chosen from the index of Göteborg Evening School for Adult Education, were contacted by telephone and asked if they could participate in an interview of approximately one hour on the issue of political power in connection with the garage-affair. Only a few refused this appeal for participation. The interviews were undertaken where it was most convenient for the interviewee: in their homes, at their work, or at the university. All subjects received a minor repayment.

The interviews followed the same general outline: first the subject was asked to give a description of the real situation, and then to answer questions on the meaning of political power. The interview was recorded and the tapes were later thoroughly transcribed. These transcriptions, normally extending some fifty pages, served thereafter as the basis for further analysis. The analysis consisted of the following stages. First they were read over and over again in order to grasp the individual touch in every case, and to find out the degree of success or failure

in each interview. Shortcomings in the interview, due either to the respondent or the experimenter could sometimes severely restrict the chance for the respondent of giving a full and adequate account of his/her conceptions. Ten interviews were discarded due to such technical facts.

In the remaining interviews, the most important parts were marked and rearranged in such a way, that specific arguments concerning special topics were brought together, even if they had occurred at different moments in the interview. For each interview then, all central constituents were extracted, including the experimenter's questions and comments, roughly in the same order as they had appeared in the interview, divided into three main parts; personal point of view, description of the real situation and statements about power. Our main results, as presented in this paper, consisted of drafts from the two latter parts. It is important to note that the transcriptions were made very close to the unedited version on the tapes, which meant that all hesitations, mumblings, rephrasings etc, were included. As the colloquial character of the excerpts is retained, the reader is provided with an unrestricted possibility of appreciating the original meaning of each single statement. Giving a complete account of the discussions around each description served the aim of providing the reader with a context against which the single conception could be understood, especially the meaning embedded in the successive development of the talk. It could be shown that many descriptions emerged from try-outs in earlier parts of the interview.

The main aim of this method is to reduce a rather long verbal monologue to distinct and condensed utterances, without losing the intended meaning expressed in the monologue. We have tried to do this by the rather detailed procedure presented here.

Result

The intention was that the interview should follow a general outline, though this was not always possible. One of the reasons for this was the large variation in how our subjects had conceived of the whole story. Without too much exaggeration one could say that no two of our subjects had the same all-over picture of the story. However, this did not affect the statements about political power so much as it

sometimes ruined our chances of keeping to our general outline in the interviews. Reading the transcripts over and over again provided us with an understanding of both our subjects' main stream of reasoning, their private attitudes towards the whole political issue, reflections on defining power and, finally, the categorization of power into four main groups. The private attitudes could be seen as resulting from either active or passive conduct. This was sometimes revealed by a straightforward statement like (a passive case):

S 123

No, I don't know very much about this. You know, I'm not the type of person that likes to protest and so on. No, I did not sign the protest list. I think it was those youngsters far to the left that just wanted to express their protest. I have no idea why they did this. Maybe they thought it was wrong to spend so much money on a garage.

Or in an active case:

S 107

Well, it's an old story, that's been discussed for years. But now it was made a main issue in the election. A question which clearly differentiated the left-wing bloc from the right-wing bloc, and it was one of the few local issues that were being discussed at all. And a lot of people voted in accordance with their standpoint on this question. It made me vote for the left-wing this time.

Sometimes the distinction between an active or a passive approach was revealed by the content in the utterance, such as:

S 103

Well, this very special issue on the garage is just a minor thing you know. It's a part of a much larger question. The background is that there are some minor groups which have had a special interest in the planning of the communication-network in the city. And those groups have favoured another solution than that of the councillors. The garage was just the concrete central point in a more complex structure.

Naturally, those individuals who had a more active attitude towards the garage issue were also more initiated in the problem. They gave a far better report of details and circumstances than those who were mainly informed by the headlines in the papers and brief accounts in the TV-news.

This fact, however, did not have a one-to-one effect on either the conception of what it was all about or on the different conceptions of power. The question of how they had perceived the whole affair resulted in three subgroups. One group saw it as a question of town-planning, like:

S 103

It's on how one should solve the traffic network in Göteborg.

S 109

It's a venture on extending the collective traffic system on behalf of private motoring. And this in turn is a question of decreasing the overall pollution in the city.

S 117

Well you could say it's a question of how to plan for the store-house density and localization in the city. A kind of city-planning.

Another total grasp of the question focussed on the mere building of a garage. These conceptions were dominated by the car park as such.

S 107

In one sense one must say that the main issue was building or not building a garage.

S 120

It was a political struggle about having a parking house in the town. One bloc didn't want it, while the other bloc thought it could be nice to have it when you go shopping and so forth.

S 123

Well personally I don't bother very much about this problem with the garage. I think it was a squabble about money. They didn't think one should spend so much money on a garage.

A third point of view was focussed on the protest as such:

S 116

It can't be a protest against the garage. It's only the bowling brats that started going again.

S 118

It's the usual howl from the left-wing groups on having private motoring totally extinguished.

S 121

They had to start the building activity at this very last minute because they knew that the forthcoming political majority wouldn't do it. Just as if they did it in protest. A bit childish. I think. Only babies make such decisions. You know, when they know that their mother has quite the opposite opinion on what things should be like.

Whether the main issue was seen as a principle of city planning, a mere building or an expression of a protest of some kind, it followed rather different argumentation on what was right or wrong in the case. Almost every one of the subjects who took part in the investigation were against the erection of a garage in the city, but their reasons for this varied widely. It also affected their internal line of evidence e.g. for those who believed it was a question of a building, the forty million cost was seen as an available resource for other enterprises in the community, while those persons who saw the affair as a matter of city planning did not use the cost as an argument.

Our main interest, however, was not concentrated on this attitudinal level of the political act as such but, rather, on how people had conceived of the way in which this whole story was handled by the politicians, the police force, the demonstrators and other groups joining the decision process. Of course, we could not get a satisfactory answer to the question "How did it all come about" without having some description of "what it was all about" but, for our purpose, this latter question more or less only served as a background for the answers to the former question on how this decision turned from yes to no in eleven days.

It is possible, with support from our data, to say that there exists a relation between an individual's degree of active interest in everyday political matters and their conception of power. It could be shown that those having a perspective dominated by absolute or magical conceptions of power also often described themselves as powerless and passive in society. And the same goes to some extent for the opposite position though one cannot say that seeing power in a relative way, automatically leads to an increase in one's chances of exercising power. The game did not seem to be that simple.

In this report, we would like to stress another point, contrary, but at the same time, parallel to the individualistic reasoning above. Namely that those conceptions of "power" and "the total affair as such" reflect the existence of a known body of conceptions bound to the phenomenon in question, and that every person must express one of those conceptions at every specific moment. In this report we would like to restrict ourselves to the description of the variation of conceptions of political power as such, but we are fully aware that the personal context, to which those descriptions belong, also contains the type of attitudinal and conceptual differences presented above. The statement made above, that different ways of conceiving of the whole task did not necessarily affect the description of political power, thus means that we do not deny the possibility of a personal perspective to imply a special setup of conceptions of power; rather we would like to say that this is the fact, but for the sake of identifying single and qualitatively different conceptions of the phenomenon of power, we do not have to consider conceptions of other phenomena held by the same person, even if the different phenomena are closely related to each other. But sometimes, a full understanding of a certain conception demands knowledge of contextual factors, such as the total perspective of the individual, the structure of the internal logic and conceptions of related phenomena. And these were our reasons for presenting the variation of how the "whole thing" was being seen by our subjects. We will return to this topic later on, when we shall try to describe how different conceptions were related in an intra-individual sense. Such a relation could be established and we will try to show how the perspective of an individual could be built up by the combination of several different conceptions and related to the conceptions of the total affair as presented above.

Another factor emanating from the total grasp of the interviews was the kind of relation held towards the concept of "power" in a definition-like way. The typical structure of this relation was that the term "power" was declared as impossible though almost everyone made use of the term in connection with suffix-like "powerless", "mighty", "they had the power", "strong-power", "power-game", "factors of power", etc. Obviously, severe difficulties arose when the subjects were confronted with the term/word outside, its natural context. Typical answers were:

S 101

I don't know whether I wish to call this 'power' or not. I want to describe it in such a way that everyone can grasp it. No, being confronted with this question, I must say my brain stops working. I have never thought about 'power'.

S 103

Well, I must say that total concept of 'power' is extremely difficult. It is something we have to try to find out for ourselves. Personally I am just trying to find my way.

S 104

Again and again and again; I don't like the word power in this text. I think a more adequate expression would be steering or the process of steering.

S 107

If one can talk about power as a concept of its own. I don't know really. I consider such questions as half-semantic, and difficult to answer; but of course, power exists as something than can be transferred from one group to another.

S 124

I can't define it; but it seems to be two different things. To me it looks like two different concepts (can you explore this further?) No, it is more difficult to sort that out, you see.

A striking difference thus appeared between the obvious ease with which our subjects made use of the phenomenon "power" and the extreme difficulties, and even refusals, that were connected with the task of defining the term "power". Synonyms were often suggested, most common were "steering" or "the process of steering". The proliferation of a scientific attempts to define power as mentioned earlier (p 1) might be a symptom of the same impossibility as our subjects had encountered. Perhaps this dilemma could be solved just by applying a more constructive conception of power. One of our subjects fully accepted the term "power" and made the following reflection on how he could so easily use a word most other persons found so troublesome.

S 106

Well, we have had from time immemorial a special form of legitimate right in this country. You can take an example with a village community some five hundred years ago. Where fire was a great threat. If one house caught fire, some ten other houses would burn down as well, and a lot of people became homeless. Then some persons, presumably not all of them, decide to form a fire-brigade and that is a political decision which takes the form of a law, so the other community members have to stand this and maybe

contribute to the cost of this brigade. Because it is anyhow a necessity for everyone to fight a fire in common. In this sense 'power' is a bad expression for something that is necessary under those conditions. A reciprocal community or a reciprocal necessity that can take on many forms in different situations should have been a better but more difficult term. So we have build a society, a community that functions in a certain way and that gives a certain kind of decision structure, which we can't go beyond without abandoning that society. Lord Acton ones said that all kinds of power corrupt and that kills very much of 'power-thinking' for the intellectual person, I think. He simply realized the risk by letting the concept of power turn into a concrete sense. A beautiful girl has power, but Leonid Breschnjev maybe thinks that power is something that he has got. Then he doesn't realize that power is always a result of many factors and is a kind of relative circumstance.

When power was described thus, the issue of definition vanished and obviously gave a certain kind of freedom in the use of the term, which was not attained by the other subjects, leaning on different kinds of conceptions of power. We will return to this discussion after having reported other kinds of conceptions found in the material.

Already in the initial part of the analysis, it stood out from the utterances that a distinction could be made on the basis of the structure of the content used. Irrespective of what was being mentioned, power was in many cases either reported as a part of something, a quality belonging to something, a kind of concrete unit, or as something which was related to one or more specific factors. In the last case one could also find examples of power being seen as the relation in itself.

Out of those we could further distinguish two other categories. The concrete unit-category sometimes took a form in which a very special concrete event or object was given an extremely high load of power with unlimited explanatory value.

The fourth kind of category was built up as a combination of a concrete and relativistic conception. They were related to each other through an overlapping rule or insight. We chose the term "absolute" for the concrete-unit-based conception of power because it was so definite and limited in its extent and was often mentioned in a quantitative fashion. The all-powerful kind of conception was labelled "magic" due to the close resemblance it had to magic and animistic ideas as described by African authors (Mbiti, 1969) and in anthropological literature

We could thus summarize our main categories of conceptions of political power in the following way.

- thematic conceptions - a synthesis of the relational character of power and its concrete manifestations
- relative conception - a description of power as something that is related to something else. Or as being the very relation between two or more entities (persons or objects)
- absolute conception - a description of power as something concretely delimited. Often quantifiable and absolute in some sense.
- magic conceptions - a description that is fundamentally absolute in character but also giving human qualities to inanimate things, attacking very high power to these. Often circular and combined with a possibility of changing reality.

These categories could be said to be based more on the inner dynamics of the particular conception, than in the factual content of the same conception. In a later part of this report we shall present the strictly content-based classifications. Our reason for analyzing power in this way was mainly that we found a very large variation in the content-based descriptions of power. Many of these were, however, recognizable as variations within specific situational themes. The four categories above represent the structural themes we could identify in the material. Thus one could distinguish between what kind of conceptions of political power were being mentioned, and what conceptions could be identified i.e. every specific content-based conception could be assigned to one of the four structural classes.

These four main structural categories of conceptions of political power were related to each other in a special sense. It was obvious that most of our subjects spontaneously mentioned either absolute or relative instances of power in the first place. When confronted with some kind of severe ambiguity or with their own lack of understanding of a phenomenon, they often tried to formulate a new conception of power in order to solve

the internal conflict between their experience and the reasoning about this experience. This solution could either be a thematized or a magical conception of power. Both were associated with a high explanatory value. Our results do not mean that these ways of describing political power could not exist without this prior experience of conflicting evidence. But in our, sometimes rather provocative interviews, this happened to be the case most of the time.

Conceptions of political power

Due to the fact that many of the conceptions turned out to be difficult to understand if not evaluated within their original context in the interview, the following exemplification has taken the form of genuine drafts from the passage where they appeared. The language was sometimes rather hard to understand as the subjects hesitated and mumbled. The reader is recommended to read the excerpts carefully.

Absolute conceptions

A1

S: Money has a vast influence in this story. Power is money.

E: How do you mean that money comes into this story?

S: Well, I don't know.

E: Whom has got the influential money?

S: Those who did not want the garage to be built. (1)

E: And in this way they somehow see to it that the garage is not built?

S: It could be so. It is just a feeling I have. Everything seemed happen so easily. (2) -If you have lost, then you haven't been capable of doing what you wanted. -If you have lost. In that moment you have dropped the power. Maybe, later you can have it back again, on another occasion

(1) This subject favoured the opinion that the local politicians never really wanted the garage to be built. They just pretended this in order to please the voters.

(2) The subject meant that money played the role of an invisible force ("Still waters run deep").

A2

S: Well there must be someone who everybody is not as well informed about things and matters. You know people pay attention to him (the manager). He has got all the external contacts, and he is the one who knows. He is thinking for you. He is the one who knows how everything ends up. And you know the one who becomes a manager who has gone the long way, he has a lot of experience. The one having the most experience, he has got a kind of majority or power.

A3

- S: Those matters of power, violence and cooperation, I mean, they are abstract things which it takes science for explain and not even the scientists are certain about that.
- E: Well but as you yourself said earlier, there are also some puzzling factual circumstances at the square. People remain for some reason at the square.
- S: Yes why ... it would really be thrilling to get to know the kind of reasoning behind the scenes here. How these councillors negotiated with the police, 'cause they have had to cooperate with the police-force. I should really have liked to know what was said there.

A4

- S: The power in this case has been, foremost, the large united opinion that has been evoked in this very special and concrete issue. And this power grew larger than the legal power of the councillors. Their formal power, as prescribed by law, to decide on the building of the garage, just did not suffice in this case.

A5

- S: I think things can change, but still you know. The more things being taken into consideration by decisions and reflections, the more power is being collected somehow in the total system. Because the total system then gets control over more and more factors and enlarged resources.
- E: So a kind of politicizing leads, to your opinion, to a strong increase in the power in this issue.
- S: Mmm (agreeing)
- E: So we might finally end up with an open battle about power?
- S: Well, yes, in a way. Though it is not really a fight about power. Power is after all just a means to reach other goals, and it exists as a system. That's rather important.

A6

- S: Well it is not only sufficient with your own will - I mean If you exert power, you do it from your position, you have got, by being elected to it. Then you can take on unfavourable decisions for those who elected you. Then you can decide as it suites yourself, I mean just look at all those bigwigs everywhere.
- E: You can just because of having a position?
- S: Oh, yes.

A7

- E: I am not certain if I have got you right here. Do you say that things turn out much easier for the demonstrators if the steering clique is becoming unsure of itself?
- S: Yes, well, no, well it must be ... well you don't know how much people have built in themselves to be able to know in advance if things should turn out their way or not. But maybe it is inherent to know or to have a feeling of the success to come.

A8

S: It is one form of power to wish to assert yourself. Always to put one own's interest in front of everything.

E: Where's the power in that?

S: I don't dare to tell you. I really don't ... I mean we just don't know that. That's something existing inside every human being. To have an air of prestige around oneself. They wish only themselves for to be dazzling and peculiar.

With these eight examples of conceptions of political power we intended to point out some different ways in which power was described in absolute terms, i.e. power being allocated to limited, often concrete, assessable objects, which would be owned, or otherwise handled by the power-holder. Power is made equivalent to force (amount of, frequency) specific personal traits or special circumstances.

Relative conceptions

R1

S: When you talk about control and steering, maybe you set too high a standard. I would like to say that they are special cases of power. And that power could be minor things. Just to affect one single act could be a powerful undertaking. The demonstrators had a certain power because they mobilized support and opinion. In a special situation.

R2

S: Power should not be seen as a single action, but rather as an inter-action.

E: What do you mean by interaction in this case?

S: It means that what determines the outcome of such an inter-action is dependent on both parties, one can say. You can't say that one of the parties has some power unless the other party decides independently to surrender.

R3

E: Does power means awareness?

S: Awareness is one important aspect of power. Because, well you know, being aware of my own interests, being aware of what goverus things etc. Well, yes that belongs to awareness. And this ties up with commitment and your attitudes. I mean to what extent you will make a stand against established attitudes. How much you are ready to lose of good-will. There are a lot of those symbolic factors attatched to power.

R4

S: The strength, of course, of our system with our ideas about democracy and majority or what have you, is this issue of the protest list. But, on the other hand, it is equally impressive, to have such a lot of people standing in the square day and night for eleven days. That shows that there's a large reserve of supporters waiting to be tapped and of a strong commitment. It really shows that some people take this question bloody seriously.

R5

S: Well there developed a strong function of power in this action as such a vast lot people gave their support to it in spite of the action being illegal and anti-parliamentary. Such circumstances ought to result in nobody's paying any attention to it, but anyhow, they did.

R6

S: Well, there they have power over us. And how they do, well they do it in many ways but well they are always the active ones, they are always ahead and we are just too passive. We are too tired and passive all the time.

R7

S: Yes, you will lose your independence if you have to take such a lot of factors into consideration.

E: Is power to be independent?

S: Yes, to be able to act independently gives power to some extent. And you can do that by having a simple question to react to. A clear stand, yes or no, without having to take a lot of other economical points of view into consideration.

E: Does that influence their power in this situation?

S: Yes I think so, Because it is easier to make a stand in a temporary and concrete question. Then you are more free and can yourself decide to make a harder stand. Yes that gives you an extra position of power. I mean they did not have any responsibility for the decision, they took no consequences of their stated opinion. You never know if this action will lead to the city becoming a slum district in the future.

The common basis for the relative conceptions of power was the existence of some kind of relation, either to the context of the indicated subject of power, or to something else belonging to the situation. The main feature can more easily be characterized in a negative way. In a relative conception, power could not be ascribed to a single phenomenon in an isolated fashion. In R6 the "activity" was made relative in this respect by being contrasted with the passivity of the non-active part. This strong relative character was made very clear in R2 where the subject explicitly stressed the interactive quality of power as separated from single actions. This, for example, implied that one couldn't determine the degree of power, or powerfulness, of an identified phenomenon in isolation. The phenomenon always took on its power value when it was dependent on some other factor or circumstance, as shown for example in R1 and R5.

A conception that utilized a unit which could be characterized as relative in itself was also referred to as "relative", e.g. faith, interaction, independence etc. A specific phenomenon could be given either an absolute

or a relative description. The support, as mentioned in A4 and R1 could be taken as an example. In A4 the support referred to a certain number of individuals and it could be questioned whether our subject meant that this group of voters was larger than the one which supported the ruling politicians when they were elected, or if he meant that the power growing out of such a strong opinion overwhelmed the formal power of the politicians. In both cases, however, "support" referred to the mass of people. In R1 the focus was directed towards the movement to create an opinion and this movement was related to a special moment or situation, meaning that such an opinion might not yield power in another situation. The value of "support" was quantitative and fixed in A4, but was made contingent on its mere existence and on other circumstances in R1.

The same could be said about R5 where the support was related to its degree of legality and the kind of people who gave the support. In R4 there was a similar parallel with A8 about personal qualifications. In A8 the power yielding unit was seen as a characteristic which goes with the holder independently of other factors. In R4 the power-yielding unit takes on its value by being done in public. The value emerges from the admiring audience by making evident a different quality in the engagement, and could not be estimated independent of this. Another kind of relativity was mentioned in R7. The core meaning was the opposite of the well-known aphorism "united we stand" but in this case the singleness was given a qualitatively different interpretation. Power was seen as the possibility of being free from contextual restrictions. A to-be-able-to-do-what-you-like-conception with an inherent understanding of the fact that reality is always contextual and that this dependency reduces the power of the individual. Though there was a high level of risktaking in this kind of power. The short-term gains could change into long-term losses, thereby indicating a need for a perpetual process of constant evaluation to balance long-term and short-term effects against each other.

Magic conceptions

M1

S: Power is bound to circumstances you can't do anything about, like-time. It's (such) a thing that just comes. Well yes, time, for example, things you can't do anything about. You haven't made any decision about it, so it is just something that is true, so, well, than ..

M2

E: Is it important to have support from a large group?

S: Yes, it is of course valuable for those starting up such an activity to have ...

E: Why?

S: Well, then they will have a stronger support from more people and in some sense it is so, that a mass of people decides upwards. But then we can return to what we said earlier that there is no guarantee that the decision is a decision of the people. Because it is a decision through the ruling politicians. There could be a hidden underlying factor.

M3

S: You can see how much is going on in the community and how many fisty things that are being found out. And you never know how much there is left which you don't know yet, but we will learn about it in the next month or so. It is a really shady business you know. They are smuggling money and things like that to. Well that's power-that's something which has got to have something to do with power. That they - that power is something essential you can get for money.

E: What will you get then. What kind of power?

S: The position to be able to decide. You take the people's... Well, you just keep staying in the position of power.

M4

E: How does it happen that the politicians can make decisions like this? (to build the garage in spite of all protests and against the will of the majority of the people.)

S: We have put them there to do so. The idea is that they (those in power) shall have a free hand.

E: You have given them the power?

S: Yes. By voting and then they can decide, And afterwards I do not feel that there is anything left for me to decide about. I can stroll around here holding a lot of opinions, but it is of no use.

(To these utterances were later added the following ones.)

S: If nobody else had reacted to this I wouldn't have reacted either.

You know one gets influenced somehow. When people start yelling. I think it is because it perpetually comes over and over again. If it had just been mentioned once, maybe one wouldn't have reflected further on that topic.

Hearing at so often, or often enough, is power.

And the politicians, they squeeze out their shift in the same way through the mass media.

So they are being steered from above as well, I think.

M5

S: Well I don't know why things happened as they did. (Why those councillors who started the building activity never carried through their plans). I have never thought about that. I just thought that they reached the conclusion: "It is nothing to argue about. What will be will be".
 If things are like that, then it will be like this I think, you can say they gave up in a way.
 And you know they didn't use their power either so - it went the the way it went. Jesus Christ, it was shortly before Christmas and the whole bank were to take of for christmas-parties and such things. I guess they had not time to sit there and quarrel about things like this. Well they just did not make use of their chance to have a free hand in managing this.

The main points in a magic conception of power could be characterized thus: Something is connected with extremely strong power. The sources of power were out of reach for the subject, often being invisible or hidden, leading to a lot of sudden moves and acts for which there is no explanation other than that it was an effect of power. The arguments often turned circular. The holding of a magic conception of power were often combined with a feeling of being manipulated or being submissive. In M4 the subject describes himself as being more or less worthless in relation to the allmighty politicians. The divine character was also evident in M5, where power was seen as an untouchable thing being beyond all discussion. At the end of the citation on M5 a very typical kind of reasoning was present. The subject meant that the politicians had abandoned their strife just because they wanted to attend private Christmas parties. An argument which presumably could hold for the subject himself, but not for normal politicians. The subject projected his own way of reasoning on to the other person's. This kind of argument could be characterized as egocentric and concretely dependent. The magic conceptions of power were always made dependent on absolute forms of power subsideraries, like time and truth in M1, the money and position of power in M3 and the "placement" of the elected politicians in M4. Another typical feature of this kind of concetpion was the ability to alter reality. This was to some extent evident in M2 where it was stated that "a mass of people decides upwards" with the inherent meaning of the majority's right to decide in our form of democracy. But just a few seconds later the subject eliminated this right when he said that the ruling politicians could with help of "power" anyhow take the decision into their own hands. Anotehr example of this phenomenon was given by the same subject who presented us with M5 in an analogy on advertising and shopping.

S: You hear it over and over again and thus you are being fed with ideas which you accept involontarity. Even if I throw away all the advertisements coming through the mailbox, I cannot escape it down-town. Wherever you go you'll see those ads. And for some strange reason you suddenly buy a brand you have not even thought of before, still it has somehow entered your head.

E: How does it come that you get so influenced?

S: I don't know. You're only a human being.

E: So everything that is being repeated grows stronger for you, gets more and more fixed?

S: Not if I'm totally against it. But no, it's difficult. They can make it sound so nice. They can distort anything in any case. If they just exert themselves enough, everything can be as beautiful as anything.

E: What makes this happen?

S: Well, it's a question of how they phrase it, how they do the marketing. It's a way of fooling really. Maybe, in principle and with a proper technique they could do anything. Just because I have no knowledge at all and I have no clear picture of things - how things come about.

Seeing power as something belonging totally to the councillors, as was expressed in M4, led the subject to see the result of the demonstration as an effect of the physical distance between the square and the town-hall where the councillors presided. The protest being "Just a stone's throw away from their offices so they couldn't avoid noticing it". Another subject had identified a "hidden underlying factor" (M2) such as "prestige" and consequently he identified "prestige" and "wish for prestige" everywhere as an extremely powerful energizer. Whenever a human act was carried out "prestige" was the major promoter leaving all other causal factors to be severely diminished.

Holding a magic conception of power led the subject to accommodate the perception of reality in order to keep an acceptual level of understanding of the same reality. The control of reality was clearly located outside the individual subject;

Thematic conceptions

With a thematized conception of power we meant two different strategies for reaching a deeper understanding of the phenomenon political power as it was being presented by the subject herself. In the first case it meant that the subject perceived the relative and absolute components of power as units that existed simultaneously and co-operated in every specific situation. The thematized conception served in this case as a summarizing

description of this relation. In the second case the thematization implied that a new figure was being constructed from the absolute and relative parts. The summary extended its own constituents, leading to a new kind of understanding.

T1

S: Well, the (the occupants) must have had some kind of power

E: What kind did they have?

S: They had a kind of power that moulds public opinion; this power being based on the great mass of people that took part in their activity and gave them their support, and also based on their own commitment and on their organization and such things. And such things do play an important part because the existing attitudes in a certain situation determines the possibility of mobilizing certain people in a collective activity. In such a way a kind of attitude resource is created. I mean as a kind of background. Think of those demonstrators here in the square. If there had not been a discussion in the society on city pollution and public transport they wouldn't have had the slightest chance.

T2

E: How does power arise?

S: Power arises through having it made possible to form one's own opinions.

E: How do you make that happen?

S: Then one gets a mandate to carry out those decisions one once have declared oneself ready to do. Like electing a chairman. I mean there are certain positions or conditions in society like the chairman in a group with the right to make decisions. In that position you have legal power. As a chairman you have some legal rights and when you are elected chairman you automatically get those rights. Another way is if you are in possession of power and appoint someone as your successor stating that you trust him, then you transfer some of the confidence others have in you to him.

T3

Lord Acton once said that all kinds of power corrupt and that kills very much of 'power-thinking' for the intellectual person, I think. He simply realized the risk by letting the concept of power turn into a concrete concept of its own. Power is nothing you can have in a concrete sense. A beautiful girl has power, but Leonid Breschnjev maybe thinks that power is something that he has got. Then he doesn't realize that power is always a result of many factors and is a kind of relative circumstance.

T4

S: Well, now once can say that in the extreme sense, their (the elected politicians) mandate to make any further decisions rests on the opinion behind them, and if that one starts to drift, so, well then their power to make legal decisions disappears. And of course, it comes to nothing if nobody is backing them up. Of course, they have the formal power still, but you can't

see this isolated from the psychological image. It can be difficult carrying out a decision if you are a politician with only a small minority supporting this, even if the decision is formally correct. Power is both to make a decision and to affect a decision. If you can do this, then you are in a position of power. And about this protest list they started by which they demonstrated the amount of persons supporting their aim. You know that must have been very impressive for the politicians. They could see how their mandate vanished in favour of the demonstrators. But if, let's say those hundred thousand signatures were written by just a few very industrious persons, thus forcing the whole protest list. You know, if it could be shown that that had been the case, then it would have created such a negative conception of the demonstration and its aim, so you would presumably have completely changed your mind and pleaded in favour of the garage, even if you didn't like it as such, just in rege over such methods. You know it is all the time a question of how one conceives of one another's different attitudes and decisions.

T5

S: But maybe you should differentiate between what you can get for money and what you can get for power, where money is based on some legal conventions about the value of the bill as a piece of paper, and power is based on some factors of force, but is still dependent upon other factors, where these latter are symbolic (like faith, judgement, commitment etc) and somehow can function as a means of exchange (like money).

Yes, I think we have made a very good distinction here when we have talked about this between force and power. It seems to me to make good sense.

T1 and T2 represented one of two ways to thematize an expressed conception. Absolute and relative conceptions were combined or summarized in one united conception still leaving the way open for a dynamic exchange and interaction between the separate units. In T1 power was seen as a multidimensional phenomenon explaining how attitudinal resources could be activated in a purposeful way and this, in turn was referred back to the outcome in the politically defined situation. In a sense the thematic conception grasped the whole issue and brought the possibility of creating new meaningful combinations of valid experiences.

T2 was a much more condensed form of thematizing, but it still belonged to the same kind of summarizing conceptions as T1. Every detail in the underlined sentences was previously defined and explained in detail, but this time everything was put together and thereby, yielded a further clarification of the difference between legal authority and necessary confidence. The central point could be phrased differently, political power is to get your ideas through with the permission of thus and with the presumption that you realize only what you have previously declared

you would do. T4 and T5 were different from T1 and T2 in the sense that these conceptions were expressed in new terms but were still an attempt to unite absolute and relative components from previous statements. These conceptions took a rather cryptic form, mainly due to their overload of hidden and implied meanings. In T4 one of the main points was the the phrases, "all the time" and "one another's", when placed in their own contexts, meant a dynamic interaction between successive questions and answers in a dialogue. Power in that sense was based on the perceived value of decisions and expressed attitudes, and this perception in turn was made contingent on the whole situation, including all the previous acts. In T5 a more abstract thematization was made. In the beginning of the interview, the subject had not seen any clear connection between force and power, but this became evident during the talk. The main points were the cooperation of symbolic and physical factors in a process of exchange between two or more interested parties. T3 was not really a thematization of a previous discussion, but expressed an insight about the phenomenon political power which could very well be taken as a concrete version of T5.

By this we mean that in T3 it was clearly stated that power could not take a concrete form; not even for the concept, was it allowed to take on a value of its own. Rather, it was seen as a relative unit being dependent on evaluation by others and seen as a symbolic factor. Still there was a reference to same kind of concrete factor giving strength like a "girls beauty" and "what Breszjnef got". There was a hidden criticism of letting political power take on an absolute form through the reference to the statement "all power corrupts". By listening to the underlying tone in some of the absolute descriptions of power, one was apt to confirm that this "corrupting" viewpoint was being taken into consideration to a certain extent. For some subjects this did not take the form of a suspicion, but rather the form of an experienced fact.

The difference between an absolute and a thematic conception of this aspect of power, could in a way be used for a further clarification of

the two categories. A person holding an absolute conception of the "corruptive aspect" of power in one sense contributed to the "corruption" by being one of its victims. A person holding a thematic conception of the same aspect of power could presumably handle this aspect as a possible variant of power and could thereby, keep some kind of distance to the concrete outcomes of the aspect.

Though we have not been able to show this one can imagine the thematic conception to yield far more degrees of freedom in a real dominant relation, than what must follow from an absolute conception. While a thematic, and presumably also a relative, conception leaves open a possibility of counteracting a "corrupted" kind of dominance, this is impossible from an absolute point of view.

Intra-individual perspective

Until now we have, except for the initial remarks on the overall grasp of the political act as such, treated the categories of description as separate entities. This is contrary to the normally - held belief than only one form of full knowledge, or one main attitude could be expressed by a subject about a certain issue. In a normal investigation reports are often made of the outcomes from the question "What is your opinion about this" or "What do you know about this". Both these aim at obtaining the subject's one and only opinion or true "knowledge". Our concern has been the opposite one. By giving each subject the possibility not only of reflecting on earlier utterances of his own, but also of trying to test the validity of these utterances against new contexts, he was confronted with as much as possible of his different perceptions and conceptions of the reality he himself had connected with the term power.

We used this technique because we soon realized that our subjects did not use one main concept of political power. On the contrary, every special context seemed to yield certain, and sometimes very specific, kinds of power-conceptions.

We mentioned earlier that the individual way of conceiving of the whole story differed widely, but that this fact did not necessarily affect the conceptions of power. In one way, however, it obviously did. The differences between individuals on whether the whole story was seen as a question of garage building, town-planning or just protesting in general, naturally affected the kind of details and circumstances to be considered when they were asked to report what it was all about. This, in turn, defined the context to which the statements on power were related, and, thus, for each individual delimited the conceptual variation possible. On the other hand, we would like to argue, as far as the same phenomenon were mentioned, there was a striking similarity between utterances and conceptions across different individual perspectives.

Unfortunately from considerations of space, we have to restrict ourselves in this report, but we will anyhow briefly try to indicate these individual perspectives.

Through latter part of the interview we perpetually returned to the question of what was meant by power in different situations and in different contexts. This had three main effects on the verbal statements about conceptions of power. Firstly, the subject often started with a vague or simplified version of a conception of power. Later on an elaboration of the conception took place. This could happen in two or three steps at very different times during the talk, but always, as far as the same concept was concerned, with reference to the first mention of the conception. For example, the subject described power as "to make a decision". Later on, this was changed to "to influence and make decisions". A further elaboration resulted in power becoming "having the position to be able to make a decision".

Secondly, with different contextual factors becoming actualized in the interview, different kinds of conceptions of power were mentioned. An interchange of absolute and relative conceptions of power developed. As these by their character, were often inconsistent with each other,

conflicts arose in the internal logic of the individual. These conflicts often implied a situation in which the individual subject had to confess that she did not understand how things could have happened the way they actually did.

There was sometimes a striking difference between the reality acknowledged and the corresponding lack of explanation. On several occasions this led the subjects to reformulate prior conceptions of power, and this often created our recorded instances of magic and thematic conceptions of power. These latter conceptions could, in most cases, be seen as a successful way out of a perceived dilemma.

Thirdly, the above mentioned processes gave the interview a fairly emancipatory character. For each subject, we thus successively identified some eight to fifteen different conceptions of political power. During the interview the subject became increasingly aware of both the depth of her own standpoint and the range of possible variation in conceiving of political power. Many of our subjects expressed this as a feeling like: "sort of clearing up the issue", "I didn't know I could think such a lot about power", etc.

A typical protocol of the successive development of conceptions of power could be illustrated as in Figure 1. The indications M1-M12 stands for different conceptions of power ("Makt" in Swedish). The subindication M1^{I-II} stands for different elaborations, basically the same phenomenon.

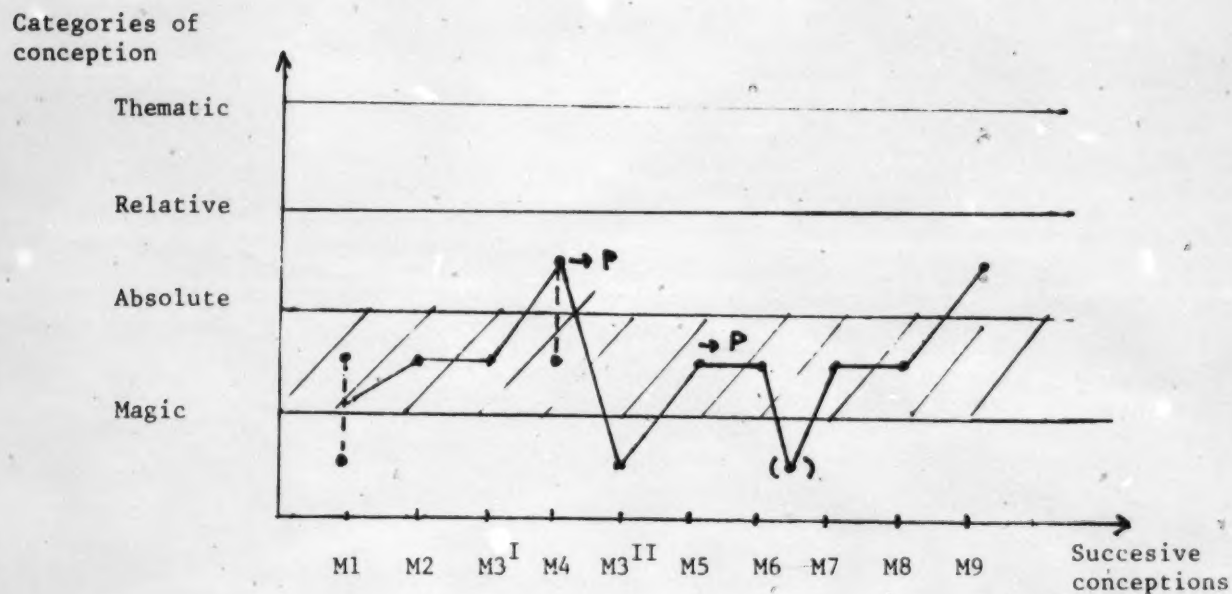


Figure 1. Successive development of conceptions of political power in categories of content structure. (Subject 123)

In Figure 1 some ambiguities appeared. Two of the categorizations were marked as unclear (M1, M4) due to their further interpretation. The formulation of M1 was obviously absolute, but the intended meaning could have been magic. This was not, however, further explored in the interview. About M4 one can say that the subject accidentally gave a relative description which was immediately denied thus implying an absolute meaning. The subject reported in Figure 1 gave the following descriptions of political power (P).

M1 P is to rule and boss people about and to get one's opinions and demands realized.

The unclear components in the M1 description originated in the subject's earlier reasoning about this "ruling and bossing". It stood out as something totally untouchable. Ruling and bossing turned out to be a means of preventing the power function mentioned in M2.

M2 Power is simply to get one's demand through. To get what you want.

M3^I In the end it's always the politicians who decide.

By this, the subject meant that it is always the politicians who decide everything. You can only hope that their decision suits you and in such a case you will get a feeling of having had power in the M2 sense.

M4^I Power is to be allowed to decide something about something to join the decision-making and influence people.

M4^{II} I mean 'to join' it always means nothing. It is far different from having your demands come true.

First the subject mentioned power as an interaction between people, but this was immediately denied by classifying the "joining" as a false and meaningless game. This, in turn, was reflected in an analogy given by the subject where two different kinds of demonstrations were compared. One of these occurred some years ago and resulted in the prevention of cutting down some trees in Stockholm. The demonstration was violent and successful. The other demonstration was "our" which according to this subject, were too calm and almost a failure. The subject was of the opinion that a demonstration had to be violent (in order) to show some strength, in order to be successful. Thus, the outcome of this "calm" demonstration was very puzzling for the subject, partly because there was no proof available of how or why the politicians could have such a free hand as they obviously had.

M3^{II} Well we have put them there, to do so. The idea is that they (those in power) shall have a free hand.

This version of M3 (it is always the politicians who decide) got a different touch than M3^I which become evident when seen together with the following remarks made directly in connection with the utterance above.

There is nothing left for me to decide about.
I can stroll around here, holding a lot of opinions but it's of no use.
They are being steered from above as well.

M3^{II} was categorized as a magic conception of power due to the hidden "idea" and the subject's outstanding subordinate position relative to the effects of the "idea". The main problem that initiated the reasoning ending with M3^{II} could be seen as a consequence of the conflict already appearing in M1 ("They" rule and "we" try to get something).

It became apparent to the subject that "the public" never had their demands realized and this could only be explained by exaggerating the impact of "the idea" on people in general and on the subject herself. But this "explanation" did not account for the fact that things actually turned out the way people desired.

M5 I have the feeling that the politicians have power over us, but if we get 'our own way in something' well, yes that's something else. I think it leaves you with a feeling of having been successful, if you get something your own way".

Here the subject described the power of single citizens as a delimited personal feeling of success. When this statement was confronted with our, in principle, democratic system and the earlier discussion on M3^I and M4^I the subject ran into a new paradox: "Well, that's a thing I always asked myself. How is it possible for such a small fraction (like politicians and demonstrators) to manage such a large amount of people, I mean if you look around". The answer to this yielded M6, M7 and then a combination of M6 and M7.

M6 If you get to hear something often, or often enough, that is power.

This conception which could be called a kind of nagging, was followed by "They can influence us very much, can influence our decisions, through perpetually coming back to certain things". This could be seen as a combination of M6 (nagging) and the following conception of human power as a personal characteristic (M7).

M7 Well we are only human.

M7 represented a variant of powerlessness and was further illustrated by an analogy on how people got, involuntarily, fed with repetitive advertizing. This could be paralleled to M3 (steering from above) which, in turn, would shed some light on the denial in M4^{II} of M4^I (to be allowed to join in). One of the means of doing all this was then mentioned in M8.

M8 Power is money

This conception was elaborated mainly through an analogy where the subject meant that money come to the politicians' help through the capitalists. The big capitalists (some were identified by names) and the politicians needed each other. The politicians needed money to keep their positions which they received from the capitalists, and in return they made decisions in favour of the capitalistic interests so that these groups could make even more money to be available for the politicians. This reasoning, however, led the subject to a new track and finally M9 was presented.

M9 Well I just thought "Keep the people down". And I mean, everybody cannot study and be active. And here they have the power over us. And how they do it, well, they do it in many ways. They are always the active ones they are always ahead and we are just too passive. We are too tired and passive all the time.

In this conception of power the subject in a sense explained the initial paradox in M4^I and M4^{II}. Power was in M9 described as a relation between the active and the passive ones, where the passive may "join in" but could never because they were too passive and tired to be able to keep up with the activity of the active ones. This, in turn, could be seen as a description of how the people were being "kept down" which was a sentence that could well be used to characterize the personal perspective of this subject.

The individual profile, as demonstrated in Figure 1, could of course, take any form. With the answers being analysed in the same way and in the same categories as the case mentioned above, the profile for subject 103 turned out as shown in Figure 2.

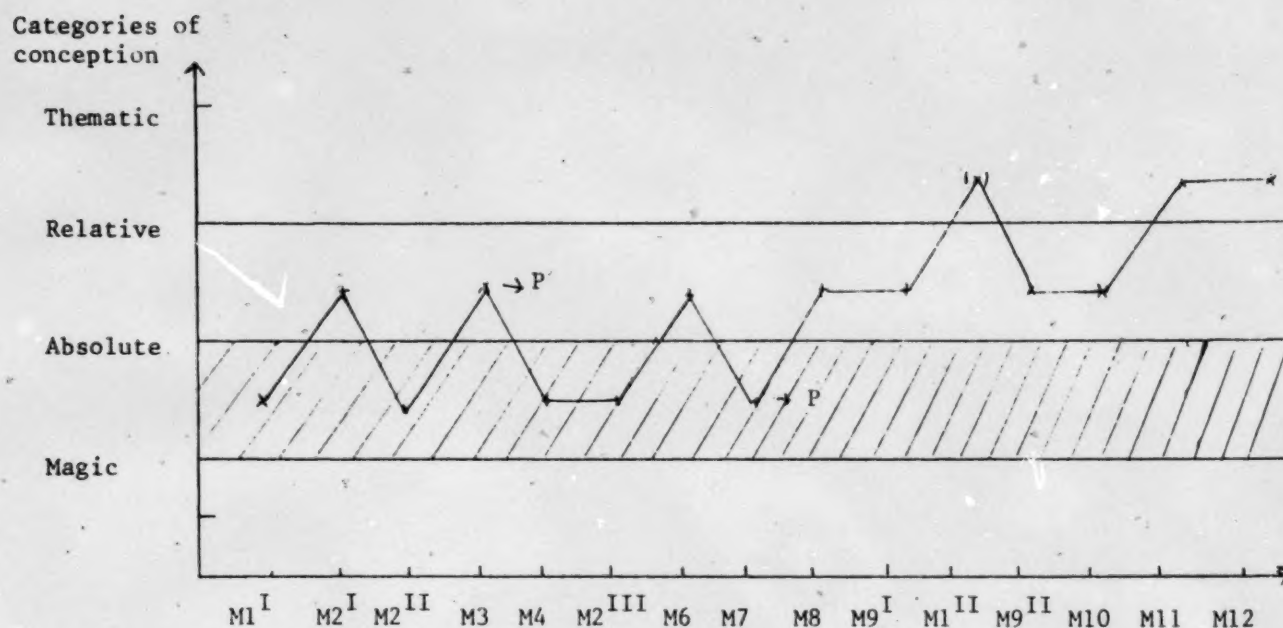


Figure 2. Successive conceptions of political power in categories of content structure (subject 103).

The profile of subject 103 was very different from the one presented in Figure 1 (p 28). This fact was equally evident if one looked at the specific meanings of the conceptions. We would like to stress the fact that even if those two individuals had very different perspectives of power, as a matter of fact they could be said to be diametrically opposite to each other, they never-the-less shared a number of single conceptions of political power. This is (being) marked with the corresponding conception of subject 123 put in brackets.

M1^I Power was a kind of ability to influence the acting of other people (based on) general resources (M6+M7).

M2^I Power was to mobilize a support and an opinion in a special situation.

M2^{II} Power was a function (sum) of your resources and the extent to which you could raise them.

M3 Power could be said to be counter power. At the same time as you mobilize you have to take into account what your antagonist does.

M4 Power is authority. To let other decide (M4^I).

M2^{III} Power is the amount of considerations being made in the total system. Gives more and more control over the entire system (M9).

M6 Power is a means (like money) (M8).

M7 Power exists as a system (M3^I).

M8 Power is an interaction between parties.

M9 Power is to show commitment. To make obvious that something is taken seriously.

M1^{II} Power is the very ability to influence others. It is a characteristic of a relationship.

M9^{II}, M6^{II} Power is a tool of analysis, being totally dependent on what people think power is.

M10 Awareness about what is going on and what might come (M9).

M11 Power was an opinion creating movement based on the public trust, their own organization and the prior discussion of public transport.

M12 Power was based on factors of force, still being dependent upon other symbolic factors, functioning as means of exchange.

Shortly, one could characterize the perspective of subject 103 as relative in nature, being advanced and reflective, whereas subject 103 took a far more narrow and restricted point of view. This was easily seen in those cases where they had focussed on a common phenomenon. E.g. the situation in which you get someone's permission to decide (M4/M4^I). For subject 123 this was in a sense, described from beneath as something "they" should give you, but never did seriously, while subject 103 described this as a more general principle. When subject 103 spoke about consciousness as a kind of awareness (M10), subject 123 mentioned this as the actual phenomenon that caused the split between active and passive groups of people (M9) where the active constantly ran ahead, because they "had" the awareness.

35 Subject 103 could describe influence as an ability belonging to a relationship between persons (M^{I+II}) while subject 123 described this in a

"magic" way as a combination of nagging and human character (M6 + M7). Some of the conceptions held by subject 103, with reference to power, were mentioned and thus recognized by subject 123, but were described as something apart from the conceptualization of power. The commitment mentioned in M9 (103) was just commented upon by subject 123 as a "kind of idealistic behaviour somebody sometimes does in order to well, help the people".

The phenomenon "to show or make a sacrifice for the good of others" was thus recognized by both subjects but was seen differently when related to political power.

Conceptions of power

So far we have discussed conceptions of political power in two different ways: on the one hand, as four structurally based categories and, on the other hand, as an intra-individual variation of different single conceptions forming a kind of personal perspective.

We would now like to return to those single conceptions and relate them to the phenomenon of political power as a whole. Just as the personal perspective could be built up by a composition of conceptions, one can see the phenomenon of political power as being built up of different instances, perceived in one or more of the four structural ways discussed. The content in our conceptions of political power could thus be analysed in terms of what kind of instance was selected in the conception i.e. what existential units in the perceived reality were described as being parts of the political power and, how they were expressed. In the following section we will analyse 77 different conceptions of political power, obtained from six protocols, with respect to what kind of existential units that were mentioned.

One can say that all protocols reflected a basic structure, meaning that political power, to a varying extent, was a question of an interaction between resources and their availability, within certain limits or under certain circumstances. The variation of conceptions mainly reflected this basic structure as it was determined by our special case. This case could in a schematic way be described as a decision between two alternatives (yes or no), about a specific but differently conceived issue (garage, city-planning, protest), between three parties (demonstrators,

local right-wing and left-wing politicians), with each part having different resources available (public opinion, the building site in the square, the police force, informational channels, time, outcome of the general election, etc).

The conceptions consisted of factors belonging to five areas: the political system, decision-making and influencing general resources, a movement or activity, and personal or particular factors. A schematic summary or grouping of this situational structure is given in Figure 3 below.

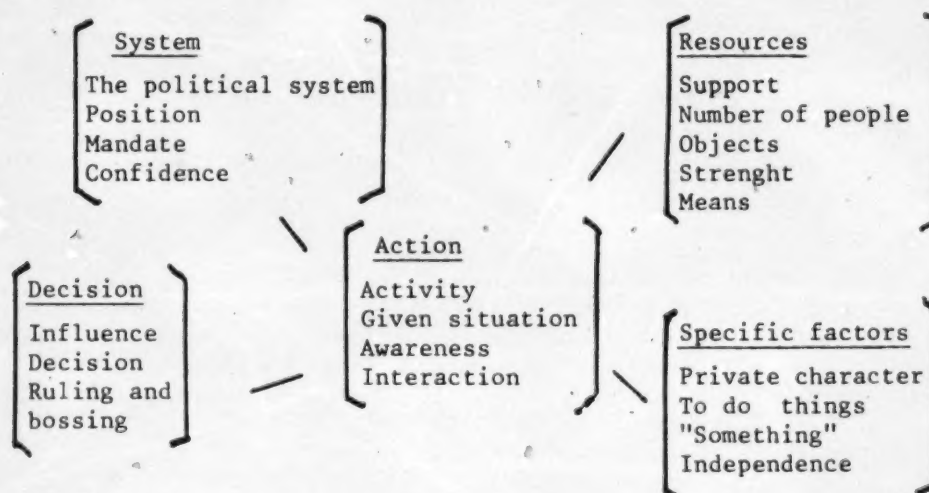


Figure 3. "Power is": A schematic grouping of areas of conception of political power.

The scheme in Figure 3 was rather arbitrarily made. None of our subjects really described this wholeness. The scheme was constructed out of our (allower) interpretation of all protocols and conceptions. In some cases the subjects themselves had combined certain conceptions as if they belonged to a common structure. In other cases, one could notice conceptions being formulated as opposite poles in a common diemnsion, where the dimension was not clearly indicated. E.g. power described as strong dependence and strong independence.

A list will now be given of single conceptions underlying the grouping in Figure 3. The conceptions have been highly condensed for reasons of convenience.

Power conceived of as:

1. The political system

1.1 The system

- power was the official power (107:2)
- power was a system (103:7)
- it is the local authority (120)
- to have the majority in our system (123, 122, 107, 120)
- they have the formal power to decide as they like, they are the authority (124:2^{II}).

1.2 Position

- to have the position to be able to decide (107:5)
- to make a decision, just by sitting in the position of power (120:1)
- you wield power, if you do it from the position you have got (123:4).

1.3 Mandate

- power was a mandate to make a decision (107:1)
- power was to get a mandate to carry out those decisions one has once declared oneself ready to carry out (107:11).

1.4 Confidence

- to have people's confidence, i.e. that they trust you to do as announced (120:8)
- power is people's confidence in you (103:11)
- power is ... based on the trust of a large mass of people and (107:6)
- dignity, in a way that people believe in them and given them their respect (124:1)
- a politician is elected to a commission of trust and that tells you all (124:5)
- it would be awful if you could use your power to ... without having to listen to the ones you represent. That would be to misuse their trust (124:6)
- it is power, because if a councillor doesn't come up to people's expectations about what a politician should be like, well then things can turn in favour of the other (the demonstrators) (124:5^{II})

2. Influence / decision

2.1 Influence

- a kind of ability to influence the acts of other individuals (103:1^I)
- power is the very ability to influence others. A characteristic of a relationship (103:1^{II})
- power is when it comes back again and again you hear it often enough (122:6)
- power was to be able to influence decisions and (107:4)
- the massmedia have a tremendous force by churning it out over and over again (123:11)
- to influence people by being allowed to join the decision-making (122:4)
- power is to get one's own way, by making other people change their minds (123:9)

2.2 Decision

- power is to influence decisions and then to be able to make decisions (107:4)
- power is to get a mandate to carry out those decisions one has once declared oneself ready to carry out (107:11)
- that is to make a decision (120:1)
- after all, it's the politicians who finally decide about what will happen. They can make decisions (122:3^I)
- well that they can make a decision and see to it that it is carried out (124:2)

3. General resources in the situation

3.1 Support, number of people

- power is a function (sum) of your resources and the extent to which you can raise these (103:2)
- power was founded on the confidence of the large mass of people, organisation and the discussion that there has been about public transport (103:11)
- power was the tremendous support in spite of its illegal character and those that gave their support (107:1^{II})
- you can get power by literally taking over their voters (107:1^{III})
- you can lose your power by losing your supporters (120:7)

3.2 Objects

- power is authority. To let others decide by sharing your authority (103:4)
- power was the amount of considerations made within the total system (103:2^{III})
- power is factors and circumstances you just don't control. Like time and such things that just come (120:6)
- it's that they have an authority (124:11)

3.3 Strength

- power is the same as strength. If you mean two factors cooperating in a situation in such a way that they reinforce each other (107:9)

3.4 Means

- power is meony, power is a means (103:6)
- power is a tool for analysis, which is very dependent on people's conception of power (103:9)
- power is founded on factors of strength which work as a means of exchange (103:12)
- if they don't listen, then you will have to use more drastic means by taking action (124:7)

4. Ongoing activity / Activity

4.1 Activity/a change

- people started to get interested in something which they at first didn't know very much about. I turned into something everyone had an opinion about (124:4)
- when they got harrassed they lost their objectivity and people's confidence went in favour of the demonstrators instead
- so they got the role of the politicians and could have their ideas realized (124:5)
- power was a movement to form an opinion (103:11)
- power was to mould support and an opinion (103:2)
- they have power by being active when we are passive (122:9)

4.2 Given situations

- power is to take advantage of a given situation (124:8)
- power is to have an advantage, to succeed by the fact that all this was a question of a relatively short timeinterval (123:8)
- they have simply taken the formal power irrespective of their moral obligation too (that they had lost the election and the people had shown they did not want the garage) because they know that they have done something they shouldn't. They should not have taken the chance in the way they did (124:9)

4.3 Interaction

- well you can call it counter-power i.e. at the same time as you mobilize, you have to take into account what your counterpart has done (103:3)
- power is an interaction between parties (103:8)
- power is to have respect for someone who shows courage (124:10)

4.4 Awareness / conception

- consciousness about what is going on and what might come is an important aspect of power (103:10)
- to show commitment, make a sacrifice that shows that something is taken bloody seriously (103:9)
- it is the whole time a question of how one understands one another's standpoints (107:8)
- it is not only the formal power, but also the psychological image around it (107:5)
- they had the formal power but they had to account for their moral obligations too (124:9)
- well I just got curious, I think (103, 120)
- you felt that the politicians had misused their power here, and that increased the effect of the demonstration (124:3)
- the ones with experience and who know they have power, how things work out (120:6)

5. Specific factors

5.1 Private feelings or characteristics

- power is to have the will to be dazzling and rather special to have prestige and to want to be a decision-maker (123:3^I)
- to show yourself, tell them your point of view and to be self assertive (123:3^I)

- how people are made, so that they can be evil towards each other (123:6)
- one gets a feeling of having had success, in having one's demand come true after all you are only human

5.2 Do things

- simply to have your demands come true (122:2)
- to carry out things. See to it being done. You build a garage (123:1)

5.3 Something

- power is something important that you can get for money (123:5)
- power could be a hidden underlying factor (123:10)
- power is an abstract thing (that one cannot explain (123:12)
- it happens as it happens, if it is so, then it will stay so (120:5)
- it is factors beyond your control, like time and such things that just come (120:6)
- it is something that is true (120:6)
- it is a struggle for power based on money (123:2)

5.4 Independence

- power is to be able to act independently without having to consider a lot of other things (107:12)
- they have the formal power to make any decisions they would like. They have the authority (124:7)
- a dictator has got power. He can do as he likes (123).

Three major typical features emerged from this way of describing the conceptualizing of political power. One was the fact that many of the specific events, or moments, being recognized were identical across individuals and also across their widely different perspectives.

The second feature was that, put together, all these constituents of political power both yielded a coherent wholeness of the phenomenon "political power" and revealed within this wholeness a large degree of contradiction.

Thirdly, it was obviously so, that each individual could hold many different conceptions of political power, when confronted with different contexts. In the same way, it was made clear that no subject was

confined to only absolute or only relative conceptions of power, but that their total perspective anyhow could be dominated by one of these. This fact resulted in a further source of variation in how to conceive of political power. The one and same constituent with identical reference to the reality, could be perceived in either an absolute or relative way. It could be both thematized and an object for magic interpretation. As some of the classifications were highly dependent upon contextual factors, for interpretation, the finer difference between absolute, relative, thematic or magic conceptions did not come out in the abbreviated forms of the conceptions used in the above passage. Nevertheless, we have found it quite useful to make this condensation, because it still leaves us with a chance to point out the coherence between the single conceptions of political power. It was mentioned earlier that some of the conceptions seemed to have emerged from some kind of common underlying dimensions. The poles of these dimension represented diametrically opposite meanings of what could be considered as the strengthening basis for the identified political power.

One such dimension was violence - peace. Most of our subjects openly denied the very existence of a violent component in political power. All subjects believed that, in our up-to-date Swedish society, the police force just could not clear the square by brute force. It was seen as something that did not belong to our way of living. If they had still made use of this possibility, the proponents of this conception mentioned that the short-term gain would have hit the politicians later on in the form of long-term losses. Violence was simply seen as totally incongruent with political power. On the other hand, violence had its supporters, in the sense that power was seen as a form of strength. Strong physical activity was irresistible but also meant conflict and evil. The struggle to get one's own way, the collecting of concrete signs of power and having an evil character, were combined with the acknowledgement of violence as a valid factor of political power.

Another dimension could be termed dependence-independence. It was rather obvious that power was either seen as "united we stand" or as the direct opposite: "to be able to do exactly what you yourself wanted to do". The power of the united, democratic majority was contrasted with the power of the dictator or elected, and thereafter isolated, clique of politicians. The unification was based on the idea that the system

provided the single individual with some kind of legal rights to form a larger pressure group, but this possibility could be hindered or lessened by other circumstances in the situation. One main characteristic of the unifying power was the idea of dependence. The closer you came to the ideas of others, or to the phenomenon, the stronger you became. The more respect others had for you, the more dependent they were on your discussions and acts, the more power would be ascribed to your own position or holding.

In this respect one could notice a sharp distinction within the conception of the demonstrators as such. On the one hand, the great variation in the kind of supporters was seen as the power yielding factor. "They represented a good cross-section of the total community meaning it was no single-handed activity in any sense". They had good contacts with the councillors at all levels. On the other hand, the demonstrators were conceived of as a strongly coherent group of those -left-wing-youngsters always ready to protest, their coherence being their absolute strength. They were admired because they took the risk of sleeping out-of-doors for eleven days to prevent the garage from being built. They were described as independent, they could make a harder stand, they were free to do what they wanted and that was their strength.

There obviously existed a puzzling conflict and contradiction between feeling affinity, being representative, respected and dependent, and being on your own, independent, unrestricted, and alone. This later position was, to add confusion to the case, both seen as the unrestricted position of a power elite (dictators, closed-down political systems, etc) and as the force pressure group who could be as "strong" as the unrestricted elite.

The outcome of the competition between those alternatives was made contingent on contextual circumstances and in which way i.e. relative, absolute, etc, the power-attributed constituents were conceived.

Concluding remarks

In this paper we have tried to present the variation in which normal adults had conceived of the phenomenon political power in their own society. The back-ground for our interest, was, among other things, a

belief that the way in which an individual has to relate himself to a certain phenomenon must be an outcome of his way of conceiving of this very same phenomenon. Cognitive growth and learning could be described as attaining a new way of conceiving, as this could be expressed in the individual description of the reality wherein a certain phenomenon occurs.

Modern Swedish society had made a rather strong demand on all citizens to grasp and understand the different qualities of the rather complicated political system. Even more if, there was a gap, between those ruling the system and those following the system, in their respective understanding or conceiving of the common reality that the political system was about to handle, then one could expect the meaning of democracy to develop into its own antithesis.

In the end the system as such could only work and function in the way it will be accepted and reacted to by its members. We have tried to describe both the ways in which normal adults could conceive of a certain similarly identified constituent of political power and how different phenomena could be ascribed the "same" conception of political power. This very wide field of variation in conceptions contained in one conceptual frame of reference might be a reason for the outspoken resistance our subjects demonstrated, when confronted with the task of defining the concept "political power". It could perhaps also, to some extent, explain why people discussing this topic do have such difficulties in talking about political issues, and why the arguments rather often develop into a disparate rather than into a unifying way. This could obviously too easily lead people to interrupt a dialogue that might be the only way to enrich a vague and "unfruitful" way of understanding their own role in society. Holding a concretely anchored and magic conception of political power simply leaves the holder with a political opportunity that is far less than that which the political system has formulated as the minimal right of any of its members. If you hold too much of an absolutized conception of constituents of political power, this leads to a neglect of vital parts of the representative idea as such. Even if it seemed to be most advantageous to have a relative conception of power, this could not be taken as a general rule. To be relative about absolute values, or rather to have relative conception of something others conceived of as absolute would result in just as strong a disadvantage as that obtained when the opposite mistake was made.

We have, with this descriptive approach to the phenomenon of political power, tried to indicate this kind of disparate reasoning and bewildering argumentation which characterize normal political discussions.

References

- Bachrach, P. & Baratz, M.S. Power and poverty. Theory and practice Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Colson, E. Power at large, mediation on "the symposium on power". In Fogelson & Adams (eds.) The anthropology of power. Academic Press, 1977.
- Dahl, R.A. The concept of power. Behavioural Science, vol 2, no 3, 1957.
- Ferrero, G. The principles of power. New York: Putnam and Sons, 1942.
- Friberg, M. Maktpolitik, maktbalans och fred. (Power politics, power balance and peace.) Rapporter från avdelningen för freds och konfliktsforskning vid Göteborgs universitet, nr 2, 1973.
- Fogelson, R.D. & Adams, R.N. The anthropology of power. Ethnographic studies from Asia, Oceania and the New World. New York: Academic Press, 1977.
- Hernes, G. Makt och avmakt. (Power and non-power.) Oslo: Universitetsförlaget, 1975.
- Lane, R.E. Political ideology. Why the American common man believes what he does. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962.
- March, J.G. "The power of power" In Gaston, D. (ed.) Varities of political theory. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966.
- Marton, F. Describing conceptions of the world around us. Reports from the Institute of Education, University of Göteborg, no 66, 1978.
- May, R. Power and innocence. A search for the sources of violence. Basic Books, 1979.
- Mills, C. Wright. The power elite. Oxford University Press, 1956.
- Moore, B. Jr. Social origins of dictatorship and democracy. Penguin Books Ltd, 1974.
- Russell, B. Power. London: Urwin Books, 1962.
- Santayana, G. Dominations and powers. Reflections on liberty, society and government. Clifton: Augustus M Kelly Publishers, 1972.
- Tillich, P. Love, power and justice. Ontological analysis and ethical applications. New York: Oxford university Press, 1960.
- Weber, M. The theory of social and economic organization. The Free Press of Glencoe, 1947.